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THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

BY

JAMES THORNE

WITH A SERIES OF ILLUSTRATIONS
REDRAWN FROM OLD PRINTS

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CONTENTS

Introductory Note	-	-	-	-	-	-	page	vii
Warwick Park to Stratford	-	-	-	-	-	-	„	I
Birth-place of Shakespeare	-	-	-	-	-	-	„	9
The Poet's Walks	-	-	-	-	-	-	„	27
The Home of the Poet and his Grave	-	-	-	-	-	-	„	41

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Holy Trinity Church, Stratford	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Barford Bridge	-	-	-	-	-	-facing page 4
Bidford Grange	-	-	-	-	-	„ 8
Shakespeare's Birth-place	-	-	-	-	-	„ 20
Ann Hathaway's Cottage	-	-	-	-	-	„ 24
Charlcote House	-	-	-	-	-	„ 28
Hampton Lucy from Alveston	-	-	-	-	-	„ 38

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

“THE quiet little town of Stratford-upon-Avon receives more pilgrims from all lands than many a brilliant city rich in palaces and temples. The neighbourhood of this town has nothing very striking in its scenery ; but many a wayfaring enthusiast, with knapsack on his back, may be found tracing the course of the ‘lucid Avon,’ or climbing the wooded hills which overlook the hamlets of this richly cultivated district. The chief charm of this smiling country lies in the memory of one who was born and who died in this quiet little town—whose parents and children here also dwelt—who cultivated some of the fields which lie around his birth-place—but whose name has gone forth through all countries as the greatest name amongst the sons of England. A little volume referring to these pleasant and memorable places,

as well as to other interesting associations of 'the Avon,' may offer a fitting companionship to the wanderer by Avon's side, and be acceptable also to many who may never have the opportunity of looking upon the scenes where Shakespeare had

'his daily walks, and ancient neighbourhood.'"

The above paragraph forms the preface to the little volume from which the following book is taken, and which requires but little further introduction.

The perennial interest which exists with regard to all literature of Shakespeare and his times, must be the plea for reprinting this little known contribution from the hand of one so able and competent to deal with the subject from its antiquarian and topographical point of view. The pen of James Thorne (1815-1881) will be duly recognised as a competent one to deal with the fascinating and well nigh inexhaustible lore concerning the early life of Shakespeare and his surroundings. From 1843 until his death in 1881 he produced innumerable contributions to the "Mirror," "Gentleman's Magazine," and "Penny

Magazine," and for several years devoted his energies to the compilation of the two volumes of his Handbook of the "Environs of London," "the result" as he himself states "of many years patient labour and personal examination and inquiry." He contributed to the "Companion to the British Almanack" for over twenty-five years and wrote the admirable introduction which was added to Charles Knight's "Passages of a Working Life" in the edition of 1871. At the time of his death in 1881 he was engaged in preparing a new edition of Cunningham's "Handbook of London." The principal published work of James Thorne, in book form, other than his contributions before noted, were four volumes published under the general title of "Rambles by Rivers," one volume devoted to the Avon, two to the Thames, and the remaining one including between its covers, the Duddon, Mole, Adur, Arun, Wey, Dove and Lea.

Possibly no new or searching light is actually thrown upon the personality and surroundings of Shakespeare's daily life beyond that which attaches to the gathering together of an eclectic series of

references and contemporary notes. On the other hand, the period at which the author writes (1845) is that when the first extensive adulation was being bestowed upon this most famous of all literary shrines. This has steadily advanced in quantity and possibly quality as well if we judge from the sincere and enthusiastic expressions brought forth with each yearly Shakespeare festival.

Concerning the actual conditions of the sights and scenes of Shakespeare's early life, they have doubtless changed somewhat since the early forties. Stratford, which should have been forbidden ground to the builder and improver and to all people generally with a passion for thrift, whitewash and restoration, to-day strikes one as rather a smart town, and the red brick edifice erected as a memorial is hardly in keeping with the spirit of the time it seeks to commemorate. All the more reason then that this little book should seek to tell its story after its own manner.

Certain references of the author, as for instance that to visitors from "the States" and the colonies will in the light of more recent developments, read

somewhat strangely, but making all due allowance for the time in which he writes, it will doubtless be found that his point of view only adds an additional charm and value to this contribution to Shakespeare *miscellanea*.

Everyone then may be expected to look with kindly inclination towards any information regarding that part of England which produced the genius of the world's great dramatist.

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THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I

WARWICK PARK TO STRATFORD

THE whole course of the Avon through Warwick Park, somewhat more than two miles, is exceedingly beautiful. The park is plentifully wooded, and broken into dell and upland ; art has been called in to impart a more cultivated air to the wild graces of nature, and her aid has been judiciously afforded. Features lovely in themselves have been adorned and embellished, but not rendered formal, nor has their original character been refined away. From near the end of the park, just beyond the large lake that has been formed on the left of the river, a fine view is obtained of the grounds and distant castle. The locality at once reminds us of Shakespeare, and, indeed, is closely associated with his name and fame. Here, a short way from the river bank, between it and the road, and just by Copdock hill,

2 THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

the wanderer will see a little rude barn, covered with thatch ; that is called the “ Deer barn,” and, according to tradition, the place in which Shakespeare concealed the venison he stole from Fulbrooke Park. This story of the deer-stealing is a singular one, and may be true ; it was at any rate believed at a comparatively early period. That which gives to it a local habitation in Fulbrooke Park is more recent ; while the connecting it with this barn appears to have Mr. Samuel Ireland for its original authority—and what that is worth, those who have followed him in anything, best know. It is pleasant to see how readily a firm-looking fiction may break down. “ A word or two,” says Mr. Knight, “ disposes of this part of the tradition : Fulbrooke Park did not come into the possession of the Lucy family till the grandson of Sir Thomas purchased it in the reign of James I.” Plainly Shakespeare could not steal Sir Thomas Lucy’s deer from this park, wherever else he might have taken it from.

From Fulbrooke, a short walk beside our stream brings us to Hampton Lucy (or Bishop’s

Hampton, as it used to be called), a village such as it is a joy to light upon, so quiet, so old-fashioned, so homely, yet so comfortable-looking in its homeliness. The church is new, but of superior attractions, and a neat school-house stands beside it. Several large trees are about it, and on the village green. The river here is wide, and with the village has a cheerful look. But we hardly quit Hampton when all is as still and lonely as though all home of man were far removed. The stream glides quietly along, scarcely a ripple stirring its surface, but when a heavy carp rises at some luckless fly, or a swallow dips his wing into it; and thick trees on every side close in the prospect.

Charlcote is on the opposite side of the river to Hampton Lucy, and it will be necessary for the pedestrian to cross the bridge at the latter place : a lane will lead him direct to the house. Charlcote House stands close to the river, in a small but richly-wooded park. A broad avenue of fine lime-trees leads to the old-fashioned gateway of the mansion. Sir Thomas Lucy built his mansion in

4 THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

1558, and it retains all the characteristics of that period. It is a large, low, red brick edifice, full of projections, which checker it with a bold play of light and shadow, peaked gables, bays, and square-headed windows, and stacks of chimneys of twisted and other quaint shapes. So perfect is it, that it hardly requires the remembrance of Shakespeare to carry the visitant at once back to the golden days of good Queen Bess. It is a place you linger about, half fearing to enter lest the charm should be broken. If Shakespeare was not here as a culprit, he must have been often here as a visitor, have strolled about the park, and looked with similar feelings of delight to those we now feel, on it and on the river. To us the chief charm arises from its connection with those days; to us it is ancient, but he saw it when it was but of a few years' date; and whatever were the wild and glowing thoughts that passed through his mind as he lay stretched—

“Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood,”

it could scarcely have entered into his imagination



Barford Bridge

that one day this place would be visited because his name had become connected with it.

The interior of the mansion is preserved with the same care and good taste as the exterior; the alterations and additions that had become necessary have been made with a strict regard to the original, and the result is all that could be desired by the strictest archæologist. The noble hall is pointed out as the place in which Shakespeare was brought before Sir Thomas Lucy to answer for his misdemeanors. Whatever may have been the cause, it is certain that Shakespeare did have some grudge against Sir Thomas, and point against him almost the only personal satire that escaped from his pen; but it is most probable it arose from other and much later reasons. Another and very narrow avenue leads from the great gateway to the parish church, which stands just at the extremity of the park by the road. And along this avenue the stranger should be sure to walk. The little sober, grey, old pile, is quite the ideal of a simple rural village church. It is, too, quite untouched, and thoroughly unsophisticated. As you look at it

6 THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

from the road, nestling so happily among the noble trees whose fresh deep green shade and dense foliage make it look greyer and older than it is, and with the grave-stones scattered about the churchyard, it seems the very emblem of peace. Among all the beautiful and impressive sights that our dear Old England can show us, none is more beautiful, more soothing, more elevating than one of her quiet village churches. The loveliest spot is rendered lovelier by it, the grandest is sanctified.

The interior of Charlcote Church contains the monuments of Sir Thomas Lucy and of his wife; and if faith may be placed in epitaphs, he was anything but what tradition would represent him. But both are doubtful witnesses, and were they to coincide they would hardly be held sufficient by a rigorous judge to save a suspected person. The epitaph on Sir Thomas's wife is really an excellent sketch of a good wife, "set down by him that best did know" whether she were one—Thomas Lucy. There is a plain stone in the churchyard with an inscription to another couple (John Gibbs, aged 81; and his wife, 55),

who seem to have been more content with each other than with the world; it is set down in what the clerk would call such uncommon metre, that it is perhaps worth copying:—

“Farewell, proud, vain, false, treacherous world, we have
seen enough of thee;

We value not what thou canst say of we.”

Perchance, if Sir Thomas could have known all that the wicked world would say of him, he would have jotted down the sentiment, if he had couched it in other words—though they would have done well enough to run in tether with “Shakespeare’s ballad.”



Bidford Grange

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH-PLACE OF SHAKESPEARE

AT Stratford we will abide awhile, and from whence we can at our leisure follow the poet's footsteps along his own Avon. The distance from Charlcote to Stratford is about four miles and a half by the road ; by the river-side, some two miles farther.

Wherever he goes, unquestionably the first place the traveller looks after is his Inn—supposing, of course, that he be turned five-and-twenty and have a wife ; for till then, travellers, especially such as have a touch of the romantic, do many strange things to their own discomfort, the horror of their seniors in the craft, and the amazement as well as amusement of all innkeeper's men. But for the master traveller, till he is satisfied in respect to his inn, faint and feeble are the attractions of the loveliest scenes, dim the brightest associations, unthought of the most glorious recollections :—what to him are the lakes and the mountains,—the birth-places of genius,—the fields that have been moistened with the life-

blood of the patriot, or the glorious monuments of man's god-like mind—if he have not had his dinner, and knows not where he shall sleep? Johnson said a toothache would speedily bring to the earth the loftiest flight of the philosopher—and certainly the pain connected with the want of an inn would prevent him attempting a flight. There is no use in denying it—a good comfortable inn *is* the desideratum of every traveller towards the end of the day.

Now Stratford is very well provided with inns—better than most places of its size; and though they are of various standing and attractions, so that the visitant may choose among them according to his taste, or the depth of his pocket, yet are they all—to speak in good plain guide-book style—held in repute for the quality of their accommodation and the moderation of their charges. Each of them, however, boasts of something all its own; and on so important a matter it may be well to add a word. There is first the White Lion, in Henley Street, near Shakespeare's house, which was the inn the Jubilee magnates made their head-

quarters ;—here, you will be reminded, it was that Dr. Greville and Mr. Wildgoose, in that not un-clever, though now everywhere-but-at-Stratford-forgotten novel, “The Spiritual Quixote,” are made to stop in their way from Gloucester to Warwickshire. The landlord there spoken of, Sam Welchman, was the son of Dr. Welchman, author of the “Illustrations of the Thirty-nine Articles.” Sam was not himself overburdened with learning, but he was conscious of the honour reflected on him by that of his father, and he used to take care that his guests should not be ignorant of it. “Gentlemen,” he used to say, as soon as he became ever so slightly familiar with them, “I dare say you have heard of my father, gentleman—a very great man—he made the Thirty-nine Articles.” Another inn, not unknown to fame, is the Red Horse of Washington Irving, where they show his room, his handwriting, and some other things of his—whereof more hereafter. Then adjoining the town-hall there is the Shakespeare, which, besides the attraction of its name for all, has an excellent kitchen for the man of taste, and for the ardent

Shakesperian a relic of *the* mulberry-tree, and, on its lawn, the font in which the bard was baptized. Opposite to the site of New-place is the Falcon, which tradition assigns as originally the residence of Shakespeare's friend Julius Shaw, but there is better reason to believe that his house was a few doors from New-place, on the same side of the way, between it and the Shakespeare Hotel. The Falcon is, however, a very old house, and may be as old as Shakespeare's time : the present front is quite recent. It too has its relics. The wainscoting of the large room in which the Shakespeare Club holds its meetings, was brought from New-place when it was pulled down, and affixed where it now remains. The present landlord has a branch of the mulberry tree, and some other matters. Having fixed on an inn, there can be no question whither next the pilgrim will bend his footsteps.

<p>THE IMMORTAL SHAKSPEARE WAS BORN IN THIS HOUSE</p>

is the inscription on a rudely painted sign-board, fixed over what looks like a very miserable

butcher's shop in Henley-street. All the most minute details connected with the life of Shakespeare have been so canvassed within the last few years, that it may perhaps be necessary to say that the belief that he was born in this house remains undisturbed. Tradition has constantly affirmed this to be his birth-place, and in a matter of kind tradition is much more trustworthy than when she tattles of the actions or sayings of eminent men. Nor is her testimony unsupported. Proper official documents exist, which prove that the poet's father, John Shakespeare, did, in 1555, nine years before William Shakespeare's birth, purchase a house and appurtenances situated in Henley-street; and it is equally well authenticated that the son owned this very house till his death. John Shakespeare had, at the same time, other property in Stratford, and some a little way out of it, but we may fairly receive the tradition which makes this his dwelling-place in April, 1564. Whatever he may have read about the house, or however familiar he may be with the engravings of it, he who looks upon it for the first time will experience a feeling

of surprise and disappointment at its extreme humbleness. Could a substantial yeoman, as John Shakespeare appears to have been, have dwelt in such a place? He will ask himself, and it will require an effort to believe in the affirmative. But the dwellings of wealthy yeomen were very different then to those of a similar class now; besides which, this house has undergone strange vicissitudes since he occupied it. Then, and long afterwards, we know that it had extensive orchards and gardens attached to it—now it is divided into three tenements, and its grounds are severed from it and built upon, or otherwise occupied. But its history will best enable us to understand its mutations, and that may be told in a very brief space. From John Shakespeare it descended to his eldest son, the poet, who bequeathed it, now described as two houses, to his eldest daughter Susannah, reserving to his sister Joan (who was married to a William Hart) for her natural life the house she then dwelt in. Her house was no doubt that now known as Shakespeare's house, with the adjoining tenement; and here she probably resided

till her death, in 1646. The other portion was known as the Maidenhead Inn in 1642. At the death of Joanna Hart, the whole of the estate of course reverted to Shakespeare's daughter Susannah Hall, and when she died, not long afterwards, it passed to her daughter Lady Barnard. She, at her demise, left both houses to Thomas and George Hart, the grandsons of Joan Hart. It continued in the possession of their descendants till the beginning of the present century. But they had been gradually growing poorer; the Maidenhead Inn had become a low public-house, and was called the Swan; the other house had been divided into two; and the lower part of that now pointed out as the poet's birth-place, was converted into a butcher's shop; the gardens and orchards were sold; and finally, in 1806, the houses themselves were disposed of to "Mr. Thomas Court, whose widow now has the honour to open it to public visitation," as the New Guide very appropriately winds up the matter.

But we must follow its history a little further. Mr. Thomas Court, himself the host of the little

inn, which he restored in part to its original sign, calling it the 'Swan and Maidenhead,' was naturally anxious to render that as attractive as possible; accordingly he gave to it a new very red brick front, and thereby for ever destroyed everything like the original appearance of the building. When the lower part of the central tenement was made to serve for a butcher's shop, its window was taken away altogether, and has not been replaced. The old window in the upper story was also removed, and a larger and most ill favoured one substituted for it. The butcher's trade continued to be carried on till within a very few years, a son of Mr. Court succeeding the Harts in that calling, and though he and his trade are now gone, the shop retains all the signs of its late employment. Add to all that has been said of the place, that it is a timber house, the parts between the large frame-work being, as in all such houses, rough-cast—that it has stood the wear of three centuries, that now the rough-cast is covered with a coarsely applied whitewash, while the beams are as coarsely covered with black—and it will not be difficult to

understand that it must be seen to a great disadvantage as compared with its original appearance. Alterations of all kinds have been made in it, and none without injuring it. And wretched as is the look of the exterior, the interior is not much better. The lower room still has the fittings of a butcher's shop of the humblest order. Hooks hang from the ceiling, and the stone floor shows signs of rough treatment in its broken flags. The kitchen is a little better. It has a large fire-place with one of those old-fashioned corners, where we may fancy the boy would listen to the fine old ballads, of which his mother would have a goodly store.

But it is the room above that is *the* room, and thither we will ascend. This room—the room in which tradition is constant that Shakespeare was born—would now be thought rude even in a cottage. It is long and narrow, with a low ceiling supported by beams, but the original ceiling appears to have been covered; the walls are not as they were originally—for the curious old window, a wide but shallow one, and placed near the

ceiling, is substituted one of the commonest and ugliest form—the fire-place is altered, and a modern grate inserted—and it is almost bare of furniture. It is not therefore easy at first to realize the feeling that this is indeed Shakespeare's birth-place. The philosopher who has discoursed with such truth and poetry on hero-worship, might here have found a large illustration of it. Into this little humble room how many of the mighty of the earth have come as pilgrims! Run over their names on the walls and in the books, and think of the force of his genius who could thus attract the noble, the wise, and the beautiful. The whitewashed walls are coated again and again with names in pencil and in ink. Names fill every portion of walls, ceiling, staircase, and windows, from grand dukes to dustmen apparently. It is curious and interesting to examine them, but more so to turn over the leaves of the books. In them are names from all climes, and kindreds, and tongues; Russians, Germans, Indians, even Frenchmen—and that before the representation in Paris of Hamlet with the part of the *Ghost* left out

by particular desire had enabled them to appreciate him—natives of Van Diemen's Land and the Isle of Skye. But undoubtedly (after the English) Americans are beyond comparison the most numerous. They come in shoals of all kinds and from all the States. Slaveholders, emancipators, repudiators; from the South, North, Midland, and far-Western. And they are by far the most enthusiastic. But this is a subject will bear opening a little. Every contribution to the natural history of Enthusiasm, however slight, is of service, and here are the results of Stratford experience.

When an American arrives at Stratford he is in an agony till he has secured a bed at the Red Horse. Washington Irving wrote a sentence which wears a very innocent appearance, but which has produced consequences—looking around him as he stretches himself before the fire in the little parlour of the Red Horse, he says:—"The arm-chair is his throne, the poker his sceptre, and the little parlour of some twelve feet square his undisputed empire." Now, excepting one had noticed the anti-republican train of thought, or rather phraseology,

one would have let this pass by as a very prettily expressed sentence should. But somehow it has caught the fancy of his countrymen, and his empire must be their empire, his throne their throne, his sceptre their sceptre. And they are preserved for them. Mine host knows his trade ; this Essay has half made his fortune, and he is grateful for it. The poker is degraded to no common uses. The legend, "Washington Irving's Sceptre," is engraved on it, and unless by special request only his countrymen wield it. Proud man is he who feels it in his grasp. He is, for the nonce, every inch a king. His frame expands, his eyes glitter, his cheek is flushed, and he thinks the President would look more dignified if he swayed a sceptre. He is convinced that Irving is a great man, and exclaims, "I am his countryman." He loses none of the exaltation of spirit while he remains at Stratford. Mrs. Court has great respect for Americans. She thinks their homage to the Bard very proper, and knows they are liberal to her. I rather guess she took me for a Yankee. She showed me all their names in the books (and



Shakespeare's Birth-place

she turns to any American name with marvellous facility), and readily told me everything about them. "Bless you, sir, many and many's the time I have seen gentlemen from America kneel down just where you are standing, and kiss the boards over and over again, sir." Often they will not be content with that, but must have a bed brought, that they may sleep in the room in which Shakespeare was born. They are eager after all relics ; one offered the good dame sixteen guineas for a little wooden box made out of Shakespeare's mulberry-tree. Nay, one of them—"What *do* you think some American gentlemen wanted me to do, sir ? Why, sir, to take and pull the house all to pieces, and carry it over to New York, sir, and there set it up again and make a show of it ; and they warranted me I should make a world of money by it too, sir ; and then if I chose to sell the pieces, I might have almost anything I'd ask for them. But no, *that* I'd never do. What do *you* think of that, sir ?"

The natives of other places are not so marked in the expression of their feelings. The sons of

the Green Isle rank next ; they spout the poet's verses vehemently, are excited by his birth-place, but far more by his grave ; if they can kiss the monument their bliss is complete, and their feelings not to be restrained. Scotchmen are quieter—they don't kiss anything. "Nae, boot is this Shakespeare's room? and whare's Sir Walter Scott's name on the wall and i' the buke?" These they eagerly carry there fingers over,—so eagerly that his name is nearly gone from the wall, rubbed out in excess of zeal,—only the tail of one of the s's is discernible. In the book it is a little plainer, for his warm-hearted countrymen point it out with such energy, while their enthusiasm, like Bob Acres' courage, is oozing out of their fingers' ends, that it has very much the appearance of having been steeped in oil.

English visitors think it a very little room for so great a poet to have been born in ; and then they pace it, to determine how large it is. Some who are infected with a taste, suggest the propriety of "restoring" it ; talk of oak timbering, propose to take up the floor, and have it turned and planed

to make it smooth, and bring the joints together—would abolish the stove, and have a wide hearth and dogs, and put some furniture in the room of the Elizabethan style. Others are very particular about its being *really* the room, and one gentleman, to make assurance doubly sure, not content with the sign-board outside the house, “brought in his carriage the other day” another board, to be hung up in the recess in the room, to inform all who come to it, that “there Shakespeare first saw the light,” or something of the sort, with a little additional flourish.

It will not be imagined, I hope, that I am quizzing these folks, or doing anything that would imply that I thought strong feeling out of place here. That there is a goodly amount of affectation brought into this house there is evidence enough ; but we may hope that there is at least an equal amount of honest feeling. After all, it matters little to us what others do, say, or think, so long as we are careful not to let ourselves affect what we feel not ; we need not heed what form the outward expression of what we do feel may take,

simply aiming, if we aim at anything, to let there be neither concealment nor display. There is surely no need of either. The affectation of indifference is as hurtful to our own hearts, and no wiser than the affectation of sensibility. Perhaps it is the one we are now most in danger of sliding into. But if there be any such symptom, we should rid ourselves of it at once. We should so cherish the feelings that lead us to visit places such as these, that no scoffer should sneer them away. They are worthy of our regard. They belong not to our lower nature, but are a part of our holiest.

With some of the same feelings that we regard Shakespeare's birth-place may we approach the dwelling of his early love, his wife, his children's mother, at Shottery. A few words will describe this humble place. The cottage is not beautiful now—it has rather as poor an appearance as the house of the poet's parents in Henley Street, and the causes that have produced this change have been the same in each, and which need not be repeated. This house is also divided, and now



Ann Hatbarway's Cottage

forms two tenements. It is a long low building, formed, like most of the old houses in this neighbourhood, of a timber framework, with a thatched roof. There used to be some few matters shown here that had Shakespeare's name appended to them; they had been considered as heir-looms, and had been long in the possession of the family. Some of them, however, Garrick induced the person who then held them to dispose of to him; and the last relic, an old oak chair, known as "Shakespeare's courting chair," Mr. Samuel Ireland purchased and carried off; being moved thereto, he says, by his veneration for the poet. Nothing is left now but a bedstead, rudely, but rather curiously carved, and which appears, probably enough, to be as old as the reign of Elizabeth. The parents of Ann Hathaway continued to reside here most likely as long as they lived, and their descendants retained possession of it till a recent period. The Hathaways are extinct now. The last of them died in this house several years ago; her granddaughter is the occupant of that half the building in which is the bedstead. The person who purchased

this property proposed a few years back to pull the cottage down, but he was induced to forego his purpose: it will probably not escape another time.

CHAPTER III
THE POET'S WALKS

AROUND Stratford there are several walks that a stranger will feel to be pleasurable in their character, but which to one used to associate them with Shakespeare's daily life will assume a beauty and a companionable nature which no stranger can possibly perceive in them, or appreciate if pointed out. We may be sure there was many a spot which some slight circumstance in his early life, some pleasant association, or mere force of long acquaintance would render dear to our great poet—beloved in opening life, and cherished in maturity; and when he had in his later years withdrawn from the pleasure and strife of the great world to the seclusion and studious ease of his native place, would be prized with fuller and deeper affection. He who loves a country life, and knows with how strong attachment such unsought and unpraised nooks are remembered, and how often the recollection of them "makes a sunshine in the shadiest place,"

may perhaps, when he comes upon some secluded glade or quiet recess, be tempted to let his fancy picture it as one of the poet's cherished objects. But we may not now do that, we are to look at those places we left unvisited between Charlote and Stratford; and this part of our river is by far the most beautiful in its whole course, except the vale of Evesham. We will take a slight turn round, but delay nowhere till we reach the point where we quitted the Avon.

Let us proceed a little to the northward, and then turning eastward wind round to Hampton. The family mansion of the Cloptons, of whom Sir Hugh, it will be remembered, was the great benefactor to Stratford, lies somewhat more than a mile to the north of the town. The Cloptons have long been extinct, but Clopton House stands. In Shakespeare's day it was a fine mansion, brick, as most of these mansions were, with those projecting gables that cause so rich and picturesque a play of light and answering shadow; its windows were not straight slits, all alike and all unmeaning, as modern taste requires, but various and all



Charlcoate House

beautiful; bays and oriels there were pleasant to look at, and suggesting pleasant fancies of seats within them, and a book or fair maiden to converse with. Quaint and fanciful were its carved and twisted chimney-shafts, tall and manifold the peaked points of its roof—a mansion-house of the olden time. Shakespeare, perhaps, often spent pleasant hours in it, often looked with delight on it as he strolled across these grounds.—It still stands. A few years ago it was entirely repaired and renovated. Nothing that consummate skill could devise has been neglected to disguise, disfigure, and utterly destroy the original character of the house. Were a dome to be placed over Westminster Abbey, and a Corinthian portico in front, and Ionic columns at the sides, and some Elizabethan shafts where chimneys are not, the alteration would not be more perfect than in this case, nor more graceful. It is a masterly work.

There are some pleasant walks beyond Clopton; there are the villages of Clopton, Bishop-ton, Ington, and other places, but they must be left for the visitant to discover. Leaving Clopton

House on our left, we may make our way across the very beautiful grounds of Welcombe. The house is gone. The park is full of glens of most romantic character, with hills equally fine in their way ; altogether, it is a place for a poet richly to enjoy. Some of these hills and dells are the remains of an ancient encampment. Passing Hatton we turn down to our river, which we may rejoin by Hampton.

Rich beyond everything else to poetical minds have been the running streams. Rivers, perhaps, have made most poets. No genuine poet who has had occasion to mention them has done so without affection, without a social regard for them beyond what he appears to express for any other object in nature. I am not forgetting the field flowers, those dearest of Nature's lesser gifts, when I say this—there is a difference so great between them, that they cannot interfere with each other. But a river is the very inspirer of poetry itself, and ever has been. We know that the grand old Greeks, who never had any fable without a pregnant meaning, so fabled. And one who was not a Greek,

but a manly northern self-dependent genius, has said—

“The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
Till by himsel’ he learned to wander
Adown some trotting burn’s meander,
And na’ think lang.”

Which is condensing a whole book into four short lines. Now what Burns said is no doubt the very plain prosaic truth, as well as a rich poetic one. The quiet lonely character of the place, the constant flow of the stream, the gentle succession of glen and hill, of clear space and shady covert, the “na’ think lang,” are just what mildly stimulate the open mind, and let in a full tide of teeming thoughts and pregnant imagery. We can have no doubt about Shakespeare having “learned to wander” by himself here in very early life. The constant *bits* of river imagery and allusion that occur throughout his poetry, prove that it was a memory that had coiled itself around his inmost being. When he said—

“I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows ;
Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with egantine ;”

32 THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

was it likely this was merely an imaginary bank ? that this so exquisite picture was not a reality ? Shakespeare was the true poet of Nature : a close observer of her every aspect ; and not a minute detailer of her various objects merely, but seeing far into her inmost mysteries. Those “ thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,” we may be sure he often felt, for the Wonderful that lies beyond the material elements seems often to have engaged his attention, and been dwelt on in prolonged musings ; but he found the corrective for whatever of obscurity and mysticism might else have resulted from this in the active employments of life, which effectually prevented him “ considering too curiously ” of such things, and therefore it is that we find with all his subtle thought the sufficient counterpoise of full practical activity. But leaving these lofty matters, we will let this lovely spot recall to our attention the poet’s river from the poet’s self. And here a companion, who has explored this part of our stream thoroughly, will lend us his aid, and under his guidance we will proceed onwards to Stratford.

A little below Hampton Lucy, where we rejoined our stream, is the spot already mentioned; we go onwards, and soon come upon a place of more than usual seclusion, shut in by the light trees—a spot whose quiet may be felt. It is a “high bank called Old Town, where, perhaps, men and women, with their joys and sorrows, once abided. It is colonized by rabbits. The alder-tree drops its white blossom luxuriantly over their brown burrows. The golden cups of the yellow water-lilies lie brilliantly beneath on their green couches. The reed-sparrow and the willow-wren sing their small songs around us : a stately heron flaps his heavy wing above. The tranquillity of the place is almost solemn.” Such are the feelings that ever flow, as flows the current we wander beside; nought can so induce the intermingling of gay with serious imaginings as a river. We pass from the small beauties of the flowers at our feet to the “almost solemn” tranquillity of the shadowy landscape by a pressing on of new thoughts that come we know not whence, and go we know not how.

“ But the silence is broken. The old fisherman

of Alveston paddles up the stream to look for his eel-pots. We drop down the current. Nothing can be more interesting than the constant variety which this beautiful river here exhibits. Now it passes under a high bank clothed with wood; now a hill waving with corn gently rises from the water's edge. Sometimes a flat meadow presents its grassy margin to the current, which threatens to inundate it upon the slightest rise; sometimes long lines of willow or alder shut out the land, and throw their deep shadows over the placid stream. Islands of sedge here and there render the channel unnavigable, except to the smallest boat. A willow thrusting its trunk over the stream reminds us of Ophelia :—

‘ There is a willow grows askaunt the brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.’

A gust of wind raises the underside of the leaves to view, and we then perceive the exquisite correctness of the epithet ‘ hoar.’ Hawthorns, here and there, grow upon the water's edge; and the dog-rose spots the green bank with its faint red. That deformity, the pollard-willow, is not so

frequent as in most rivers ; but the unlopped trees wear their feathery branches graceful as ostrich plumes." These were the scenes in which the boy would lay up unconsciously large stores of poetic imagery. Here he would seek after the "Daffodils,

"That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty."

The thousand-fold evidences of it show that it is "not only a more reasonable view, but one which is supported by all existing evidence, external and internal, when we regard his native fields as Shakespeare's poetical school. Believing that in the necessary leisure of a country life, encumbered, as we think, with no cares of wool-stapling or glove-making, neither educating youth at the charge house like his own Holofernes, nor even collecting his knowledge of legal terms at an attorney's desk, but a free and happy agriculturist, the young Shakespeare not exactly 'lisp'd in numbers,' but cherished and cultivated the faculty when 'the numbers came.' We yield ourselves up to the poetical notion, because it is at the same

36 THE AVON OF SHAKESPEARE

time the more rational and consistent one, that the genius of verse cherished her young favourite on these 'willow'd banks.'

' Here as with honey gathered from the rock,
She fed the little prattler, and with songs
Oft sooth'd his wond'ring ears ; with deep delight
On her soft lap he sat, and caught the sounds.' "

Joseph Warton.

And with what delight the man, grateful to his Muse who had taught him how he might

" Some instruction draw
From the meanest thing he saw,"

had filled his heart with such inexhaustible stores of beautiful thoughts and richest poetry, and enabled him to associate with the sights and sounds of nature the moral and intellectual being of men—with what delight would he return to the scenes of his early youth, to which he owed so much of exquisite enjoyment, now doubly dear, as bound up with all the joys of his home and the dearest objects of his affections !

Beyond Alveston our beautiful river curves widely, and for a little its course is again through open meadows, losing for a brief space somewhat

of its loveliness. A little farther, however, more than makes amends for this slight break. In this part of our course—for miles, indeed, either way—"the most romantic spot is Hatton Rock"—a high and steep bank, rearing its brow against the fleecy sky. Its side is covered with an intricate variety of the lesser trees and underwood, hazel and thorn, and the long trailing brambles. From the base of the bank the tall high stem of the abele rises above its fellows, the willows and alders that fringe the edge of the stream. The river rolls over a stony bed, filling the ear with a quiet melody. As you make your way along the foot of the rock, at every slightest bend a fresh and grateful change is before you. Now the light feathery willow glitters against the deep green of the alder beyond, the silvery leaves of the white poplar tremble all over with the slight breeze that moves not a leaf of the oak beside it, a kingfisher darts from beneath the overhanging bush, and is quickly followed by his mate. A little farther you find yourself shut in by a close barrier of trees; the water seems to have suddenly ceased to flow, and collected into a

smooth dark pool, with a thick crowd of trees rising up from it and reflected in it ; a closely screened spot, a calm sylvan scene, the perfection of quiet. A swallow flashes close by you, dips suddenly into that pool, and the smoothness is gone in a moment ; the trees, and herbage, and blue sky painted upon it, are broken into wild distortion ; long lines of ripple circle wider and wider ; the surface of the dark pool is ruffled, but all else is tranquil as ever. A few steps beyond, and you have a rougher picture. The trees are fewer, and throw out their branches, wider by the rock side ; the rock itself comes boldly into view, its surface broken, its summit irregular. A bold tongue of land stretches half across the stream, bald and rugged from the last flood-tide ; upon it the black torn trunk of an old willow stands up headless, leafless ; from its roots, bare and exposed, a water-rat looks out stealthily. The water curls round it, the wind chequering its surface with long streaks of light like frosted silver, and giving an appearance of life, and even of peacefulness, to the whole. Proceeding onwards, we come upon the richly



Hampton Lucy from Alveston

wooded grounds of Welcombe, but its beautiful dells are not seen from the river. On the other side we see some of the roofs of Tiddington, but nothing that requires or attracts notice.

From Ben Jonson to William Cowper every poet has associated the name of Shakespeare with that of his river. There is, however, little need to quote them to convince any one that the Avon is Shakespeare's Avon : his own verses tell it, and in strolling along this part of its course, we cannot but feel how entirely he had made it his own. We are again approaching his town ; yonder is the tower of the church wherein lie his bones, giving a sober and solemn finish to this graceful landscape. And as the sun is setting rapidly there, see how it shapes out for us images such as perhaps here formed themselves before his eyes :—

“ Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish :
A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air : . . .
They are black vesper's pageants . . .
That, which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns ; and makes it indistinct,
As water is in water.”

CHAPTER IV

THE HOME OF THE POET AND HIS GRAVE

STRATFORD is a clean, quiet town, pleasantly situated on the right bank of the Avon : it is a place of no large size, without any manufactures, of little traffic ; its buildings are not very remarkable : one who knew nothing about it might ride carelessly through it without a wish to stop his horse. Were he told that it was in Stratford—the birth-place, the chosen retreat, and the grave of Shakespeare, he would, however, look on all about him with very different sentiments. He would eagerly examine every spot connected with our great bard, or that existed when he dwelt here; especially would he desire to realize the Stratford of Shakespeare, to divest the place of all that has been added to it since he walked about its streets, and to reconstruct whatever has been destroyed.

Dugdale gives the history of Stratford pretty fully, and, to what he collected, a pains-taking inhabitant added, some years back, such additional information as the researches of himself and others

had brought to light since Dugdale wrote. So that the history of Stratford is pretty well known, and by calling in all the comparative aids that are available to the student of borough and parochial antiquities, its condition at any particular period can be guessed at without much fear of any great error. The value of this is manifest with regard to the vexed question of the position of the father of Shakespeare in society, and its probable influence upon the character and fortunes of the son, the means he might possess of educating him, and many other points of great interest bearing more or less closely upon the early life of the poet. This is treated at length in the Biography above referred to, and there the reader will find the inferences arising from the several facts, or suggested by them, fully illustrated.

Stratford is the name of several towns in various parts of the country, and the same derivation applies to all of them, “a *ford* or passage over the water upon a great *street* or road,” and belongs to the time when bridges were few or none. The addition, *upon-Avon*, explains itself. Though a

place of some importance long before the Conquest, its early history is a blank. It was ecclesiastical property, and nought of importance disturbed its quiet life. The different monarchs granted to it fairs and so forth at the request of its owners, the Bishops of Worcester ; and the inhabitants gradually increased in numbers and in wealth, as numbers and wealth were then counted. In 1542 the Bishop of Worcester exchanged Stratford for some lands in Worcestershire, belonging to the Duke of Northumberland : a few years afterwards Edward VI. bestowed upon it a charter of incorporation, and when, about 1558, John Shakespeare commenced housekeeping, it was apparently a flourishing corporate town, with all the array of officers, from high-bailiff and alderman, to third-boroughs and ale-conner : and with somewhat more than a thousand inhabitants. It had too, no doubt, its market-place, with the town-hall just by. And the approach was no longer by the ford, or the rude wooden bridge that succeeded it, for a lord-mayor of London had, in Henry the Seventh's time, built for the inhabitants a substantial stone bridge.

Then, attached to the guild, there was a grammar-school, which must have been in tolerable order, for Edward VI. was careful to provide for that in his charter, whence its name had been changed to "the king's new school." "But we are not to infer that when John Shakespeare removed the daughter and heiress of Arden from the old hall of Wilmecote he placed her in some substantial mansion in his corporate town, ornamental, as well as solid in its architecture, spacious, convenient, fitted up with taste, if not with splendour. Stratford had, in all likelihood, no such houses to offer; it was a town of wooden houses, a scattered town—no doubt with gardens separating the low and irregular tenements, sleeping ditches intersecting the properties, and stagnant pools exhaling in the road. Even in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the town was nearly destroyed by fire; and as late as 1618 the privy council represented to the corporation of Stratford that great and lamentable loss had 'happened to that town by casualty of fire, which, of late years, hath been very frequently occasioned by means of thatched cottages, stacks

of straw, furzes, and such-like combustible stuff, which are suffered to be erected and made confusedly in most of the principal parts of the town without constraint.' (*Chalmer's Apology*, p. 618.) If such were the case when the family of William Shakespeare occupied the best house in Stratford—a house in which Queen Henrietta Maria resided for three weeks, when the Royalist army held that part of the country in triumph—it is not unreasonable to suppose that sixty years earlier the greater number of houses in Stratford must have been mean timber buildings, thatched cottages run up of combustible stuff; and that the house in Henley Street which John Shakespeare occupied and purchased, and which his son inherited and bequeathed to his sister for her life, must have been an important house—a house fit for a man of substance, a house of some space and comfort, compared with those of the rest of the population." No one who has examined the old houses that remain here and in the villages around can doubt this. An old inhabitant of Stratford assured me that fifty years back such a house would have been deemed

adequate to the need of a substantial family. Houses were then occupied by those whose sons, without being any wealthier or higher in rank than their fathers, would not dream of living in them. As for the labouring population theirs were miserable clay huts, often of only one room—now happily almost entirely swept away. The first event that a local historian would note after this time is one that suggests strange reflections. William Shakespeare was born in April, 1564; in the summer of the same year Stratford was ravaged by the plague. “From the 30th of June to the 31st of December, two hundred and thirty-eight of the inhabitants, a sixth of the population, were carried to the grave.” None of the name of Shakespeare appear in the dead-list. Malone says—“A poetical enthusiast will find no difficulty in believing that, like Horace, he reposed secure and fearless in the midst of contagion and death, protected by the Muses to whom his future life was to be devoted.” We who are not poetical enthusiasts, but plain wayfarers, will believe that another and stronger guardian kept the destroyer

from entering that house. The fires to which allusion has been made occurred in 1594 and 1595, when two hundred houses were consumed. The last great fire that happened was in the reign of James I., when fifty-four of the wood-and-thatch houses were destroyed in less than two hours.

In a long range of buildings, belonging to the corporation, which adjoins the chapel of the Holy Cross, is a room appropriated to a grammar-school, to which it is probable that William Shakespeare, when the blue sky was thick patched with the small broken clouds, and the cuckoo was calling in the woods, and lords-and-ladies were plenty in the dry dykes, might have gone

“ With his satchell
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.”

That he did attend this school has been shown to be most probable; and it is folly to affect superior wisdom by the constant exercise of incredulity. This is a place that must be visited. Part of the building is now used as an alms-house; that portion nearest to the chapel is the ancient guildhall. It

is over this hall that the old school-room is placed. Till towards the close of last year it was a plain room, with a low plaster ceiling, supported by thick beams, that projected from the sides of the room. A few old forms and desks were in it; and one desk, that looked ruder and older than the rest, was called Shakespeare's desk. This is altered now. The room has been neatly repaired, and restored to something like what may be supposed to have been its original appearance, and it is fitted up more conveniently for scholastic purposes; but it has lost its old look. The desk is gone. How long it had been called Shakespeare's desk does not appear. There was probably very little of the old wood left; for I was told by some who had many years back been scholars here, that it was thought a point of duty for every boy to carry away with him a relic of it; and most were expected to supply their friends with fragments. That Shakespeare really was educated here is most probable. It was the fashion in the last century to consider him as unlearned. The result of all the sifting that the subject has had in our day appears to be much that

which a diligent reader of his works would arrive at from them, that he received a fair initiation into the ordinary learning imparted in a public school—he could probably read Latin without difficulty, and through Latin he acquired the grammar of his own tongue. The wonderful mental powers with which he was endowed were not left by him uncultivated, nor unfed. His reading must have been extensive, although that is the smallest and least prominent of his attainments. Shakespeare will not stand among the Bentleys for his learning; nor among the Burtons for his reading; but he may stand alone for his knowledge, as distinct from either. That is, he *knew* more of the wide world, of man, and all that concerned him, than any one who ever lived and wrote. And in point of variety, and fulness of information, he was beyond most. Johnson somewhere says, that “he who has read Shakespeare with attention will find little new in the crowded world;” and for such an eulogium a man might even be content to forego the honour of being a senior wrangler. We may fairly conclude that his school education cleared the way for that

higher education which every man must give himself. Probably even Shakespeare's mighty intellect might have derived advantage from higher scholarship; but it is perhaps more likely that his resolute self-dependence would have been lessened, and his originality somewhat impaired. Even he might have been fettered by the golden chains of the ancient giants,—and though he would in the end have broken from the bondage, it might not have happened till later, and a few years in his not long life would have been a grievous loss to the whole world.

Before quitting this building the lower room should be seen. As has been said, this was the ancient guildhall, and in this, when players visited the town, their performances used to take place. Theirs were not regular, and skilfully constructed plays, setting a grave or merry story in a fitting vesture—a living portraiture of man in his wisdom and in his folly—of the good and evil of existence. That it was left for Shakespeare to accomplish. These players had some instructive mystery, an allegory perhaps, and a very proper, moral,

innocent one too. Dull enough to read now, duller to listen to; but one which then our ancestors appear to have both heard and enjoyed. These players were not vagrants. They were teachers. Their play would be gone to as now-a-days folk go to a lecture. Among the accounts of the corporation of Stratford are many entries of sums paid out of the corporation funds for theatrical performances; the use of the guild-room being of course free: the players were always a travelling company. Probably there was no charge to the spectators, or a very small one, and there would be a goodly audience. The boy, William Shakespeare, might have heard his first play here, and probably did. Perhaps his thoughts were first turned to plays on one of these occasions. We sometimes hear wonder expressed that Shakespeare should have continued to write plays, and to retain his connection with the theatre, in his maturer years. The profession of a performer was not then held in more esteem than it has been since; but if he had been disposed to break from it, there would have been even more difficulty then than there

would be now, and that even now it would be no easy thing for a man moving in a line of life not accounted a very high one, and who had not received a regular education, to quit that and establish himself in any other, a good many very superior men have had bitter experience of. It does seem, by passages in his "Sonnets," that he was sometimes not at ease, but he did that which all must learn to see is wisest,—he turned to the best account his circumstances, and did not peevishly fret after such as were unattainable. All things considered, perhaps there was no form of writing he could in that age have adopted that would have produced so great influence as that he used, it may be, because it was the necessary one. Shakespeare did not write merely to amuse—there was a purpose beyond that. He had no other way so ready, none so sure, to impart his own views of the deeper objects and mysteries of humanity, and he does not appear to have been unconscious that those views were of the largest significance. Clear and subtle as was his insight into man, versant as he was in all the less prominent disguises of society,

he saw that he could influence and instruct his countrymen more quickly, more extensively, and more thoroughly through the ear as well as the eye than by the eye alone. Had he written an epic—and it is not given to one man to write many epics—we might have had the noblest the world has seen, and, as a reward for many years of toil, some few hundreds of his contemporaries might have read it, and have studied it. As it was, he burnt-in his thoughts into the hearts of thousands—aroused to noble purpose many a startled and conscience-stricken listener,—for the men of that day were not a sceptical generation,—and breathed a full stream of glorious and gladdening poetry into many an opening mind. That he really did believe that thus holding up a mirror to his fellow-men he should best accomplish a noble purpose, a careful perusal of his works will surely satisfy any one. It is not undeserving of notice that what we gather from his works was his intent, really formed the starting-point of some of the noble German poets of the last century. Many of these, men of the highest culture, looking around them and earnestly

considering how they might effect their end, did just arrive at the same conclusion as Shakespeare had arrived at in a state of society in many respects similar. In our country, whatever other opinion men may hold of the theatre, they will most agree that it is no longer the powerful instrument for moral and intellectual culture it then was. The wide diffusion of books, and the equal desire to read them, have so changed our customs ; the whole state of society, indeed, is so changed, that there can be little doubt that were Shakespeare alive now he would not adopt the forms he found most suitable then.

Adjoining the building we have been looking over, and which was a part of the old Guild, is the Guild Chapel, or Trinity Chapel, a plain unassuming edifice, but not without beauty. The original chapel was of the thirteenth century, but towards the close of the reign of Henry VII. it was taken down, all but the chancel, and rebuilt at the cost of Sir Hugh Clopton. This Sir Hugh was a munificent benefactor to Stratford, the place of his nativity ; the fine bridge that yet crosses

the Avon here being another of his princely gifts. Separated from this chapel by a narrow street, Sir Hugh built himself a mansion, which at his death he bequeathed, under the name of the Great House, to a nephew; from him it passed to others, and was at length purchased in 1597 by William Shakespeare. At this time it was called *New Place*. Shakespeare repaired it, and made it his home. He was now only thirty-three, yet he had secured a sum sufficient to purchase this the largest house in his native town. He appears to have been in the habit of spending a portion of each year in Stratford, so long as he continued to practise his profession in London; the last years of his life he lived there entirely. There is no certain record of his manner of life during this period—unhappily memoir-writers had not then sprung up, and it is only by putting together many fragments, none of which, however, were penned till long after his death, that ever so slight a glimpse of the interior of his home can be obtained. He bears a genial fame here and elsewhere, and we may be sure he was of a cheerful, hearty, open, manly spirit.

Nothing more prominently marks his writings than the cordial sympathy they display with all manner of men. His homely life could not but have been one of delightful enjoyment. To escape from the turmoil and many unpleasantries of his London life to his quiet country home, his wife and children, the friends of his youth and of his manhood ; to the sweet stream whose every nook was as the face of a familiar friend, and to his books, never so enjoyed as when away from the world's noise and strife, must have been like a renewal of youth ; and as his children climbed his knee, and she who had been the gentle approver of all his early hopes and plans, and the sharer of his sorrows, sat beside him, humble and fervent gratitude would sweeten and soften the joyousness with which he would recognise his many blessings. He must have felt that he was not as his neighbours, that few indeed of the men whom he met with could enter even into the glorious imaginings he had embodied, but never lived the man who less gloried in himself or his doings. Frank, sensible, gentle, ready with a smile or a word of wisdom, as either might be

most serviceable, his would be a quiet peaceful life here in his chosen retreat—ready to interchange all courtesies with his neighbours or acquaintances—and resting with calm enjoyment in the hourly delights of his home. His manhood was a steady, resolute embracing of the duties of his life; without complaint, without vapour. He knew his work, and he did it. In his life a wise and good, a sensible, manly man—in his works the mightiest genius.

New Place was rendered by him a most pleasant spot. His garden reached down to the river, and was laid out in the somewhat formal but rich style then prevalent. Here, in peace and quiet happiness, surrounded by his family, and in the enjoyment of a well-earned fame, the last years of his life were passed, and “hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ his Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting,” to use the solemn words of his will, written when “in *perfect health* and memory,” a month before his death. The fate of the house is singular. He left it to his eldest daughter; and in 1643, while

she resided in it, Queen Henrietta Maria came to Stratford with a large army, and made New Place her home for about three weeks. From Mrs. Hall it passed to her daughter, Lady Barnard, and at her death was repurchased by the Clopton family. Sir Hugh Clopton, barrister and herald-at-arms, dwelt in it in the earlier part of the last century. He repaired the house and built a new front to it. "This was the first stage of its desecration." The other stages were quickly passed through. In 1753 the Reverend Francis Gastrell purchased the house: his treatment of it is not a little remarkable. In the garden was a goodly mulberry-tree, which according to tradition was of Shakespeare's own planting. This tree had acquired in consequence considerable fame, and gentle Mr. Gastrell found himself pestered with visitors to see it: he loved his ease more than a wilderness of trees, though every particular one had been a poet's planting; in 1756 he cut it down to rid himself of the annoyance. The wood was purchased by a watchmaker in Stratford, who converted it into a variety of little carved boxes, and other like things, making a small

fortune thereby: it has been said that there are articles enough purporting to be made from it to have constructed a man-of-war; but this is only a repetition of an older joke. Mr. Sharpe, the maker of these things, shortly before his death made an affidavit that he had put his name to none (and on all that he made he stamped his name) but those he had made from the true tree, and there is no reason to disbelieve him. These little relics are now sold for considerable sums.

The people of Stratford were angry at the loss of their famous tree, and broke the reverend Vandal's windows. But they had a more serious cause for anger soon. In 1759 he caused the house itself to be razed to the ground. This was a strange and apparently wanton act. The only cause that has been assigned for it is that he claimed to be released from the assessment of the poor's rate, on the plea that he resided a large part of the year at Lichfield; but as his servants occupied the house during his absence, this was refused, and he declared it should not be assessed again. This promise he fulfilled in the manner stated.

A plain house occupies the site of New Place now. The garden is divided and built upon: the Stratford theatre stands on a portion of it. Of Shakespeare's house and grounds every trace has vanished. Nearly opposite to the site of New Place is an old house that stood in Shakespeare's time; it bears the date of 1596 on its front, having been raised after the great fire of 1595. Better than any description will it tell the look of a fine old country town in Shakespeare's day. It is in admirable preservation,—a delight to look upon. A quaint, elaborate, half-timber structure, built as houses then were with a goodly superfluity of material, and no lack of labour. It is not a large house, about the size of one of the smaller shops in a leading London street, but with more fancy about it than in hundreds of them. If the particular skill expended on every house erected in Stratford for the last half-century were concentrated in any one, it would not approach in any respect to this old one, though it is only of an humble order in comparison with some in other towns. They did not make houses from pattern-books then.

Not far from New Place, on the same side of the way, is the Town-hall, so often named in connexion with the Jubilee. It was built in 1768. It is not remarkable as an architectural object. In a niche outside is a statue of Shakespeare presented by Garrick; who at the same time presented a portrait of himself painted by Gainsborough, which hangs in the large room. This large room is a very handsome one, much more handsome than is often met with in a country town.

The Jubilee in honour of Shakespeare, and for the glorification of Garrick, took place in 1769. It was sufficiently absurd in its details, but those strangers who were present appear to have been satisfied, and the townsmen were delighted; it may, therefore, now pass without further question. Cowper inserted a passage respecting it in his "Task," that has far more bitterness than the occasion called for. There remains nought more to require attention now but the church. The stranger, however, must visit the fine old bridge, if only out of respect for its generous builder: it is a well built and handsome structure. Some time

back an iron foot-bridge was affixed to one side of it, the old way being only wide enough for carriages. The appended part nowise disfigures the original. It still bears the name of Clopton's Bridge.

Proceed we now to the last spot of all : one dear to the lovers of our bard, as the place in which he lies after all his glorious achievements. Stratford church is a structure of large size and unusual beauty. The bold free hand of the old English architect is seen to advantage here. It is placed on the banks of the Avon, which is fringed by a few willows, and from the river our church appears of surpassing gracefulness. It has transepts, nave, chancel, and aisles ; a fine tower and steeple. The tower, transepts, and some other portions are of the Early English style, and very perfect ; the remainder belongs to a later period, and is not less graceful. Its windows are some of them full of rich tracery. The approach from the town is by a curious avenue of lime-trees. The whole appearance of the pile with the surrounding objects is extremely pleasing. Beautiful as is the exterior, the interior is even more

so. It has very recently been fully restored, and with very great skill—so great skill, indeed, is displayed, that little is left to desire. All the barbaric refinements and embellishments of the last two centuries have been swept away—would they were in every church in the country—and there is really now a fair restoration of the whole to its original state, with some little concessions, indeed, to modern requirements, but all done in the spirit of its original contrivers. And this is as it should be. Let us have all that really belongs to the primal state, but it is mere pedantry, or worse, to insist on having such things brought back as are now obsolete. Assuredly the original builders of these noble piles would have been the last to devise such things if there had not then been a use for them. The old font that was here in Shakespeare's time is here no longer, but the new one is modelled from it. Two handsome stone pulpits have also been placed here. The monuments in the church are many, and, besides *the* monument, are interesting. One chapel is entirely filled with those of the Clopton family, and many of them are handsome.

On the north of the east window is a marble tomb to the memory of John Combe, the friend of Shakespeare, and whom he has been charged with libelling in some rhyme that would have disgraced a Thames waterman. The statue of Combe was executed by Gerard Johnson, the sculptor of Shakespeare's bust.

But all else sinks into insignificance before the monument of Shakespeare, rendered, too, so doubly interesting by the likeness of him it has preserved. The monument was rather a showy one originally, having been fully coloured. The bust of the poet is in a recess between two black marble pillars: his hands rest on a cushion; the right holds a pen, the left a sheet of paper. The bust was executed by Gerard Johnson, a native of Holland, and, it is said, was thought by the friends of the poet to be a good likeness. It has the appearance of being a likeness, but it was not executed till some time after Shakespeare's death. It is a careful work, but not a masterly one: what would be the worth now of a real bust from the life by some Chantrey of that day? This

represents him in his full manhood, a comely, pleasant man ; but it wants the living look of genius. Originally it was coloured to represent life ; early last century it was very carefully restored, the original colours being exactly reproduced. Towards the close of the century, Mr. Malone, the editor of Shakespeare, obtained permission to bring it more into accordance with the superior taste of the day. Accordingly the colours were scraped off (some say the bust a little scraped too), and the whole was painted over with one uniform tint of white. It is a bitter evil that our national memorials are thus at the mercy of every ignorant and perverse blunderer : this is no isolated case of destruction or mutilation ; it has been going on everywhere and on all kinds of ancient monuments for centuries, and it is going on still, and probably will continue so to do as long as there remain any to deface or to destroy. The original character of Shakespeare's monument is gone for ever. It may be painted again, and a proposal was made to that effect some short time back, but there will always be extreme uncertainty about the correctness of the

repainting, if, indeed, it be true that Malone had the old paint scraped off—but it would be worth while endeavouring to ascertain if any of the original colour remains under the present coating. The Shakespeare Society has a painted bust, but there is no proof of its authenticity. Some gentleman, whose name I have forgotten, is said to have one also coloured from the original, but it is probably of no value. The original appearance of the monument is thus described, and it will be remembered that this bust was set up by those who knew him best:—

“The eyes were of a light hazel, the hair and beard auburn. The dress consisted of a scarlet doublet, over which was a loose black gown without sleeves. The lower part of the cushion was of crimson colour, the upper part green, with gilt tassels.” The inscription is too well known to need repetition. His remains rest under a plain freestone a few feet from the wall. The lines on this have been almost universally misprinted, and distorted in appearance by the admixture of large and small letters, it may

therefore be as well to give them exactly as they occur :—

GOOD FREND FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE,
 TO DIGG THE DUST ENCLOSED HEARE ;
 BLESTE BE $\frac{E}{Y}$ MAN $\frac{T}{Y}$ SPARES THES STONES,
 AND CVRST BE HE $\frac{T}{Y}$ MOVEß MY BONES.

This grim inscription, whoever placed it there, has had its effect. Shakespeare's bones have been spared.

